

WACC's History and the Role of the Netherlands

WACC's 'pre-history' stems from different meetings of Christian broadcasters in Europe and North America, encouraged and supported by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and the World Council of Churches. It was essentially the mission boards who saw the need to bring the churches into the mainstream of communication development, recognising the importance of local capacity-building by providing training and resources. Representatives of three Christian denominations from the Netherlands were present at the Informal International Conference on Religious Broadcasting that took place in Chichester, England, in October 1950. Three years later they took part in wider meeting at Bossey, Switzerland, that established the World Committee for Christian Broadcasting (WCCB). The WCCB held its World Conference in Germany in 1957, attended by more than 100 representatives of religious broadcasters worldwide. At its Second World Conference, held in India in 1961, delegates voted to change the WCCB's name to World Association for Christian Broadcasting (WACB), electing Drs van Gelder of the Netherlands as co-chairperson. When the WACB became the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) in 1968, one of its Associate Directors was Drs. Aad J. Van Dulst.

WACC formally began in 1968 with the merger of the World Association for Christian Broadcasting (WACB) and the Co-ordinating Committee for Christian Broadcasting (CCCB) – a consortium of Christian Councils in the South. Both organisations were primarily interested in radio and television broadcasting, yet they recognised that Christian communication had many dimensions and that the new organisation would need to have broader concerns. In 1975, WACC merged with the Agency for Christian Literature Development (the successor to the Christian Literature Fund established by the World Council of Churches in 1963).

When WACC established a Group Media Development Unit in 1976, focusing on 'alternative media', it was chaired by Drs Jan Hes, former president of Interfilm and member of WACC's Central Committee.

In 1982, WACC's Secretariat was reorganised. In part this was to establish a 'forum' role, which would facilitate discussion of issues related to the use, ownership and control of new information and communication technologies. A new programme called 'Women in Communication' was established in 1984. This became one of WACC's most successful undertakings and evolved into the current Programme called 'Media and Gender Justice'. In that same year, WACC established a Small Projects Fund, and since that time much of WACC's work has been carried on in partnership with grassroots organisations.

The Association formally adopted its *Christian Principles of Communication* in 1986. These have been fundamental to defining WACC's mandate. They were the background to the first Congress held in Philippines in 1989, and the foundation for the five-year 'Study and Action Programme' which began in 1991.

Over several years WACC supported many women's projects, and from 1987 to 1992 initiated a series of consultations on women and the media in various locations around the world. However, it was the Bangkok conference on 'Women Empowering Communication' (1994) that established WACC as a major contributor to the international women's movement. The Dutch Foreign Ministry was the largest donor for the conference. It was at this conference that the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) was proposed, a widely acclaimed initiative which WACC continues.

WACC's second Congress, held in Mexico in 1995, offered an opportunity to identify priority areas for its work. As a consequence, a second five-year programme, covering the period 1997 to 2001, was developed, including a focus on indigenous and marginalised people, on communication policies on gender representation and women's rights, and the provision of scholarships and training opportunities.

In connection with the launching of the People's Communication Charter – an initiative of Professor Cees J. Hamelink, University of Amsterdam – WACC organised a public hearing on 'Languages and Human Rights'. It took place in The Hague 1-3 May 1999.

Communication: From confrontation to reconciliation' was the theme of WACC's third Congress which took place in the Netherlands in 2001 with substantial Dutch government support. Following this, the work of the Association was organised into two programmes: Regional Development and Global Studies. The former

was concerned with supporting small, local projects in the South and the work of the Regional Associations, while the latter identified, articulated and responded to more global issues.

In 2005, WACC's governing body resolved to:

- *Relocate the Secretariat from London to Toronto*
- *Restructure the governance of the Association*
- *Adopt a new operating model based on integrated programmes.*

Each of these decisions has had a significant impact on the Association, and taken in combination they are expected to increase the efficiency and the effectiveness of WACC in the long term. The move to Canada and the change in governance structure were intended to reduce operating costs. The new approach to programme delivery hinges on two principal elements: 1) the adoption of a new programme framework for most or all programme activities, and 2) the merging of its two separate programme units into a single unit.

Dutch and Global Partners

It is clear that without the long-term support of Dutch, German, and Swiss funding partners, WACC would not have been in a position to pursue its vision of a world in which communication is recognised by all as a human right and as the basis for peace and social justice.

Since 1984 ICCO has been one of two leading European partners, providing undesignated block grants (and occasional supplementary designated funds) that enabled WACC to operationalise its activities. Other Dutch funding partners over the years have included Stichting Communicatie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, Nederlandse Zendingsraad, NCRV, Radd voor de Zending van de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, Stichting Rotterdam, Stichting Stern van Afrika, Unie voor Christelijk Onderwijs, Wilde Ganzen, and Kerkinactie.

Prominent Dutch WACC members over the years include:

Drs. Jan van Dis, WACC Treasurer (1976-83)
Rev. Dr. Albert van den Heuvel, WACC President (1996-2003)
Piet Halma, WACC Vice-President and President of WACC Europe
Wim Koole, IKON
Sytze van der Werf, NZR (past member of WACC Central Committee)
Daan Buddingh, Radio Netherlands
Dr Cees Hamelink, University of Amsterdam
Dr Ineke de Feijter, University of Amsterdam

WACC has maintained long-term ecumenical partnerships with the World Council of Churches, where it has an advisory seat on the Central Committee, and the Lutheran World Federation, and working relationships with the Council of European Churches. It is a member of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and serves on the HIV and AIDS Strategy Group.

WACC also works with several international groups such as SIGNIS, INTERFILM, the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), UNIFEM and UNESCO.

In the global south, WACC has maintained relationships with (for example) the Conference of Churches of Asia, the Latin American Council of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches, the Caribbean Conference of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches and many local partners in over 70 countries.

Current donor partners are located in Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States.